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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002035

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/RSP, G/TIP, INL, DRL/ILCSR
LABOR FOR ILAB
JUSTICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND CRIMINAL DIVISIONS
STATE PASS TO USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [ELAB](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE STAKEHOLDERS UNITE AGAINST HUMAN
TRAFFICKING

REF: MANILA 951 (STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS TO COMBAT
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS) AND PREVIOUS

¶1. SUMMARY: On August 20, Ambassador joined civil society groups, as well as Philippine government and private sector partners, to inaugurate an aggressive campaign against human trafficking. The event, held at Manila's North Harbor, attracted a diverse crowd to mark a renewed and expanded initiative to combat the root causes that make Filipinos -- especially women and children -- vulnerable to being trafficked internally and globally. The campaign will also expand public-private partnerships by enlisting further support of private companies from the fields of transportation, staffing and recruitment, and media. The Ambassador used the occasion to honor the Embassy's longtime civil society partner, Visayan Forum Foundation President Cecilia Flores-Oebanda, as a "2008 Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery," as designated by the 2008 Department of State TIP report. END SUMMARY.

A COORDINATED CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT TRAFFICKING

¶2. The Philippines has been a leading source of migrant labor in the world since the 1970s, resulting in a domestic economy today that depends on its eight million overseas workers for at least ten percent of the GDP. While the economic benefit has been profound, this emphasis on migrant labor has also created conditions that foster human trafficking. The Visayan Forum Foundation (VFF), which hosted the event, is a nongovernmental organization established in 1991 that works to protect marginalized migrants and especially trafficked women, children, and domestic workers. The VFF has established a network of partner organizations, which helps VFF provide assistance to potential and actual victims of trafficking. With the help of multiple U.S. grants through G/TIP and USAID, the VFF had assisted more than 32,000 people as of June 2008.

¶3. Delivering the keynote address, Ambassador emphasized that strong partnerships -- particularly public and private cooperation -- give greater leverage to advocates in the fight against human trafficking. She noted that the Philippine Port Authority's partnership with the Visayan Forum Foundation dates back to 1999, when the Port Authority constructed the first halfway house for trafficking victims at Manila's North Harbor and tapped VFF to manage the facility. VFF now runs a total of seven halfway houses at strategic ports throughout the country (Manila, Batangas, Davao, Iloilo, Sorsogon, Surigao, and Zamboanga), and its partnership with the Port Authority has proven to be an enormous success.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

¶4. On hand to mark the occasion were key Philippine officials from the Office of the Ombudsman (a national office that fights corruption), the Port Authority, and the Manila International Airport Authority. Corporate representatives from Microsoft Philippines; Manpower, Inc.; international public relations firm OgilvyOne Worldwide; and media enterprise Probe Productions also showed support for Ambassador and VFF President Cecilia Flores-Oebanda's signing of the covenant. VFF President Flores-Oebanda noted in her remarks the thousands of migrant workers who are trafficked, lured by promises of a better life in the urban centers of the Philippines and abroad. She stressed the urgent need to work together in tightening and effectively enforcing border controls.

¶5. Ambassador took the opportunity to recognize the compassion, dedication, and zealous advocacy against trafficking that Flores-Oebanda has shown and presented her with a plaque commemorating Flores-Oebanda's selection by the Department as a "Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery" -- one of only 17 worldwide. Noting that the award also highlighted Flores-Oebanda's "groundbreaking work to collaborate government and NGO efforts to combat trafficking," the Ambassador reminded the audience that the success of the covenant signed that day, just like VFF's past achievements, would hinge on the strength of our partnerships.

MANILA 00002035 002 OF 002

FORGING NEW ALLIANCES

¶6. Not only did stakeholders commit to redoubling existing efforts, the covenant signing allowed supporters to celebrate new developments in innovative anti-trafficking cooperation: The Manila International Airport Authority is constructing the Philippines' first airport-based halfway house and expects to open the shelter in late 2008 at Ninoy Aquino International Airport under the management of VFF. Also, the Office of the Ombudsman has established a program called TARGET that is now prosecuting human trafficking cases that implicate government officials. Finally, advertising firm OgilvyOne supplied pro-bono design services to VFF that have resulted in new advocacy materials in various media formats for VFF's critically important awareness campaign.

¶7. The joint covenant also shows strengthened support of innovative programs. VFF underscored commitment to its partnership with Microsoft Philippines to provide information technology training to victims of trafficking at VFF shelters and other community centers throughout the Philippines. The VFF-Microsoft partnership led in 2006 to the "Stop Trafficking and Exploitation of People through Unlimited Potential" (Step-UP) Project, and since then has provided basic computer training to more than 5,000 victims and potential victims of trafficking. VFF continues to partner with private shipping and land transport companies to train their personnel to identify and report possible human trafficking cases. The Philippine Airlines ground and cabin crew are set to undergo the same training in the coming months.

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